DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 479 PS 021 841

AUTHOR Carlson, Helen L.; Stenmalm-Sjoblom, Lena
TITLE Improving Teacher Education through International Cooperation and Partnership.
PUB DATE Jul 92
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the International Council on Education for Teaching (Paris, France, July 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Comparative Education; Early Childhood Education; Educational Assessment; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; *International Programs; Partnerships in Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Exchange Programs; *Teacher Exchange Programs; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS *Sweden; *United States; University of Minnesota Duluth; Vaxjo University (Sweden)

ABSTRACT

The Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Vaxjo University in Sweden and Early Childhood Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, have established a three-part, collaborative, research-based international project to improve early childhood teacher education. One aspect of the program is a two-tiered student exchange. Undergraduate teacher education students attend classes at each other's university during the regular academic year, and graduate, in-service students attend intensive summer courses at each other's campuses during the summer. Another aspect of the project is an ongoing collaborative faculty research project. Survey and interview research students involving parents and practicing professionals have been completed and published in both countries. Findings indicate a more inner-directed, group-oriented approach to teacher education in Sweden, and a more outer-directed, individualistic approach in the United States. The final aspect of the project is a combination of student exchange and research. Advanced students who are currently teaching have become involved in action research where questions of mutual interest (e.g., parent involvement and integrated curricula) have been studied in each country and the results shared. Further, new models of practice have been implemented in each country through graduate research with an international component. (AC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 479

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

IMPROVING TEACHER EDUCATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP

by

Helen L. Carlson, Ph. D.
University of Minnesota, Duluth
Department of Instructional Science
Montague 228
Duluth, Minnesota, USA
Phone--01-218-726-7148
Fax-0091-218-726-6336

Lena Stenmalm-Sjoblom
Vaxjo University
College of Education
S 352 33 Vaxjo
Sweden
Phone--46470 68689
Fax--46470 15665

International Council on Education for Teaching
Paris, France
July 20-24, 1992

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Helen L. Carlson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 021841

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Teacher education programs at Vaxjo University in Sweden and the University of Minnesota, Duluth, have established a three part, collaborative, research-based international project. This six-year-old project and its impact will discussed in the presentation.

Part One. There is a two tiered student exchange. Undergraduate (preservice) students attend classes at each other's universities during the regular academic year. Graduate (inservice) students attend intense seminar courses at each other's campuses during the summer. New insights have been gained through lecture, discussion, comparative papers, and observation of practice.

Part Two. There is an ongoing collaborative faculty research project. Survey and interview research studies among parents and practicing professionals have been completed and published in each of the countries. Findings indicate a more inner-directed, group oriented approach to teacher education in Sweden compared to a more outer-directed, individualistic approach in the United States, raising significant issues which have impacted teacher education programming.

Part Three. A combination of student exchange and research has been developed. Advanced students who are currently teaching have become involved in action research where questions of mutual interest (parent involvement, integrated curricula) have been studied in each country and the results shared. Further, new models of practice have been implemented in each country through graduate research with an international component.

Early childhood teacher education with an international component could have several outcomes–1) descriptions of what has been, 2) descriptions of what is, 3) interpretations of relationships among various educational phenomena, 4) plans for proposed changes to improve education. These outcomes are seen from the perspectives of different countries and/or societies (Thomas, 1990). Through using a systems perspective which involves considering what happens in micro social settings (family or early childhood program independently), in meso social settings (family and early childhood program interacting), and in the macro system (the larger societal context), consideration of education as both a force for change (conflict-theory) and a force for perpetuating the structures of society (structural-functional theory) can occur. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly & Altbach, 1986; Thomas, 1990). Diverse learner outcomes for children can also be identified and critiqued, outcomes such as development of cognitive abilities, self-actualization, learning content from academic disciplines, development of technological skill, or learning to change or

reconstruct society (Eisner, 1974). Curriculum which is inclusive and transformative can lead to social change (Banks, 1989).

Over the past six years, a three part model of international collaboration to improve early childhood teacher education has been created between the Early Childhood Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, Duluth in the United States and the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program at Vaxjo University in Sweden. The three parts include student exchange (undergraduate and graduate), cross-cultural research (survey and interview), and practitioner projects (action research and model adaptations by advanced students/practitioners). Each of these components will now be described by first describing the components and then delineating the impact of each component on the improvement of teacher education programs.

STUDENT EXCHANGE

Undergraduate Program

Description of Program

Thirty undergraduate students have been involved in a three-month exchange experience. Students enroll in regular

courses at the university courses and complete an independent study designed to provide in-depth experience in an area of special interest.

Courses typically include general education offerings in the liberal arts as well as courses in early childhood currriculum and methods (including practicum). Independent studies have ranged from explorations of special education to those involving native peoples (Ojibwe Indians) to those comparing teacher education programs in the two countries. Upon return to their home university, students report about their exchange experience noting similarities and differences.

Impact on Teacher Education

Where students from two countries are enrolled together in a single class, questions naturally arise. For example, when developing lesson plans, contrasting samples were created which led to in-depth discussion of not only what is included but why. Why do we not have more group-oriented learner outcomes in the United States? Why is so little emphasis placed on step-by-step planning in Sweden? Why are conceptions of the teacher's role different in the two countries?

Students from Sweden, after investigating the American Indian culture and educational experience, stated that they now had different perspectives about minority populations in their own country. The students went on to study Lapp peoples and refugee culture in Sweden with insights gained from Ojibwe people in the United States, leading to an more inclusive approach to early childhood programming. Students have commented about the importance of learning from others, about learning more about their own country's philosophy of education, and the possibility of combining the best from the practice of two countries (Sjoblom & Johansson, 1992).

Graduate Program

Description of Program

Intense, two-week seminar courses occur with approximately twelve students from the United States visiting Sweden every other summer and ten students from Sweden visiting the United States in alternate years. Students hear lectures and engage in discussion with early childhood experts in each country. They also have an opportunity to visit and observe in the variety of early childhood programs available.

A variation on this format is the inclusion of students from both Sweden and the United States in an advanced class where readings and discussion form the basis of learning.

In Sweden, US students were involved with open preschools, child care centers, and immigrant preschools. In the United States, Swedish students engaged in observation of early childhood family education, child care centers, Headstart, early childhood special education, reservation preschools, and kindergarten (Sweden is moving from a school start age of seven to six at the present time). Debriefing discussions were held to process the content and observational material. In-depth comparative papers on various aspects of early childhood education were written.

Impact on Teacher Education

In addition to describing the components of early childhood education in each country, the graduate students regularly used a systems' perspective to probe relationships among parents, teachers, children, and policies of the larger society. The policies of Sweden which offer generous parent leaves at the birth of the child or if a child were sick as well as health

insurance were found to be in stark contrast to the non-existent family policies in the United States. The role of the private business including the public-private partnerships of the United States will be needed as the political environment changes in Sweden. It is now legal for early childhood teachers to start private programs in Sweden.

Advanced students also used evaluative strategies in comparing and contrasting early childhood education and early childhood teacher education in the two countries. They raised questions which focused on learner outcomes--is it more important to support the child and facilitate learning than to provide substantial direction in activities? is it more important to explore topics in depth or to have a new learning center every week? why does the teacher's role seem more professional in the United States than in Sweden? why is learning to read and write more important in preschools in the United States than in Sweden? These questions led to considerations of differing conceptions of curriculum and the different ways teachers can be prepared to implement "curriculum." Papers written by students in the advanced class

became, in turn, literature for the undergraduate students at Vaxjo University.

Students not only described current practice but also interpreted relationships among various components of early childhood education. They engaged in some evaluation of current practice, increasing understanding and perspective taking.

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Survey

Description of Project

Two faculty (the authors), one from Vaxjo University and one from the University of Minnesota, Duluth, jointly designed a research survey which probed the views of parents and professionals regarding a) the impact of the larger society on early childhood education, b) the value of various materials, methods, caregiver interactions, and parent involvement opportunities, c) demographic variables. The survey was distributed to a stratifed random sample of ten percent of the parents and professionals in St. Louis County, Minnesota, and Smaland, Sweden.

In the analysis of the data, the chi-square statistic was used to test the significance of differences in the

responses. Results such as the following indicated that parents and professionals in the United States were more concerned with rule compliance and directive materials and more attuned to use of technology with children than these same groups in Sweden (Carlson and Stenmalm-Sjoblom, 1989; Carlson and Stenmalm, 1990).

Impact on Teacher Education

Results from the survey studies have been presented and discussed at national conferences. Interest in the social policies of the Swedish society which impact young children and their families has been high. This has lead to more advocacy components within teacher preparation programs. What was done in Sweden to develop policies to support families? How could these strategies be adapted for more effective advocacy in the United States? How can the private sector become involved with early childhood programs in Sweden? These are some of the questions which now are addressed more fully in early childhood teacher education programs.

Interview

Description of Project

To complement the survey research, in-depth interviews have been conducted among sixteen randomly selected parents

and professionals in Smaland, Sweden and St. Louis County, Minnesota. The questions related to conceptions of a) high quality child care programs and societal support for them, b) important components of child care programs, c) relationships of early childhood programs to compulsory school, d) guidance issues with young children, e) responses to sex and death issues, f) preparation for formal education in reading and writing.

Analyses of this qualitative data used the "cut and file" method with emergent categories developed by Bogdan and Biklin (1987). Results indicated that parents and professionals in the United States were more attuned to activities, varieties of small group learning experiences in all areas of the curriculum. In Sweden, parents and professionals spoke more often of "being" with children, of facilitating their development in what might be termed non-directive ways; they described a philosophy which was coherent and consistent with practice.

Impact on Teacher Education

This unpublished research has been presented at a national teacher education conference (Carlson, 1992). Teacher educators were not only interested in descriptions of the results and how these may have been influenced by the larger

society, but also were determined to examine their own methods' courses from the perspectives offered in the research.

In several teacher education courses, emphases have shifted from observations and structured interviews as ways of learning about children to more open-ended conversations with children. Greater portions of the course have been devoted to "informal" curriculum rather than the "activities" for learning. An already child-centered, developmentally appropriate curriculum has become even more facilitative.

The scope and sequence of course offerings has also been changed to allow greater connection between theory and practice. The "block" approach practiced in Sweden, where students take intensive coursework at the university for several weeks and then have all-day practicum experiences for several weeks, is being modified for use in United States programs. This will promote greater personal integration and development of an early childhood philosophy. On the other hand, the "block" approach with many weeks of all-day practicum can, if it starts too early in the teacher education program have a pervasive effect on the students. The philosophy of the teacher education

program can often be better facilitated by a course with interspersed practica--such a course is now being developed in Sweden.

Thus, survey and interview research have lead to extensive critiquing, probing of the relationships of various education issues, and actual changes in emphases in methods' courses.

PRACTITIONER (ADVANCED STUDENT) PROJECTS

Action Research

Description of Project

Practitioners (graduate students) who have become acquainted with each other through the visitations and courses have registered for a cross-cultural action research course.

Through this, they have designed studies of mutual interest which would influence and improve their own practice. After initial discussion, literature searches were conducted and studies developed. Results have been written into formal papers.

Impact on Teacher Education

By its very nature, action research is designed to systematically study what is happening in particular early childhood sites in order to improve practice (Aarends, 1991).

In one action research project, the issue of parent involvement was addressed. Through survey and interview with parents in cities in two countries, new formats for parent input were created in both places (newsletters in Sweden; pre-enrollment home visits in the United States). In another project, developmental continuity was addressed--the attention to individual development as a child moves from preschool to kindergarten to first grade (or from preschool to nursery school to compulsory school). Ways to use interview to document the child's point of view related to learning are now being used in both countries.

Here a component of teacher education has been directly related to improvements in field practice. The action research process will continue to impact practice. In turn, these changes in practice are reported back to current students.

Adaptation of Model Programs

Description of Models

Two master's theses have focused on adapation of model programs in the Sweden to the United States. In one research study, the Doverberg/Pramling interview process (Doverborg & Pramling, 1985) developed in Sweden was modified and used in

the United States. The research was valuable in helping young children engage in metacognition as well as assisting teachers in becoming sensitive to children's emotional, social, and cognitive development.

In another research project, the Open Preschool Model (where family day care providers and their children come to a neighborhood center once a week for support and play) is being adapted in a neighborhood in the United States. A collaborative process is being used by a center early childhood professional as she works with family day providers in her area. This process and its effects will be systematically reported and studied.

Impact on Teacher Education

Here, graduate research projects, a part of advanced early childhood teacher education degrees, have been influenced by the international component. In turn, the projects are resulting in improved practice in the field, one of the end goals of teacher education.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Impact on Teacher Education Preparation

Individual students, going through both undergraduate and graduate programs have been affected. When students from one

country attend classes with students from another country, they not only describe what is happening in early childhood education but to question commonly accepted practice–the nature of lesson planning, the physical settings established for children, the support of the larger society for children and families.

The teacher education program itself has also been impacted. As a result of interpretations of research, course components have been added or strengthened in areas such as advocacy and child study. The scope and sequence has been changed to allow greater connections between theory and practice.

Finally, early childhood practice itself has been affected. New models allowing greater support of family day care providers and more concern with developmental continuity for children have been developed and implemented. Greater sensitivity to minority cultures has also arisen.

A Summary Framework

International education has often taken an either/or position. Either the work has focused on a structure/function approach, where maintenance of the status quo is the primary

emphasis or the work has taken a conflict/social change stance, seeking to implement improvement with more inclusive programs. This three part collaborative model, described above, accomplishes a synthesis. See Figure 1.

The outcomes related to describing current practice and finding relationships among the various components of early childhood education relate well to the structure/function approach. The outcomes related to evaluating current practice and creating new models for practice connect well with social change frameworks. See Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

The undergraduate student exchange focused on describing what is happening with some evaluation of current practice. The graduate student exchange addressed describing what is and finding relationships, with some emphasis on evaluating current practice. The cross cultural faculty research component concentrated on finding relationships using a systems perspective while also considering current practice and the evaluating and creating of new emphases in teacher education.

Finally the practitioner (advanced student) research considered primarily the creation of improved practice through implementing and studying teaching/learning exemplary practices adapted from another country. This has resulted in more inclusive, comprehensive, and sensitive programs for all children and their families.

It is a comprehensive program such as this three part collaborative teacher education collaboration model which builds lasting change. When both the structure/function framework and the conflict/social change orientations flow with different emphases in different aspects of the program, a synthesized whole can be achieved. And on-going individual growth and improvement of both teacher education programs and practice in the field is attained.

Figure 1. Improving Teaching Education: A Three Part Collaborative Model*

Overall Framework	Collabor. Components / Outcomes	Student Exchange Under/Grad		Faculty Research Sur/Inter		Graduate Practitioner Research Action/Models	
Structure Function Approach	Describing what is	++	++	+	+	+	+
	Finding and interpreting relationships	+	+	++	++	+	+
	Evaluating current practice	+	+	+	+	+	++
Conflict/ Social Change Approach	Implementing and researching new practice in field	+	+	+	+	++	++

++ Primary emphasis

+ Secondary emphasis

References

Aarends, R. I. (1991). *Learning to teach.* New York: McGraw-Hill. (*Action research for teachers,* 479-487).

Banks, J. (1989). Integrating curriculum with ethnic content: Approaches and guidelines. In *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives,* 189-207.

Bogdan, R. & Biklin, S. K. (1987). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Carlson, H. L. (1992) *A cross-cultural study of interviews with Swedish and United States early childhood teachers: Implications for practice.* Paper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators. Denver, Colorado. (Co-author, Sjoblom, L.)

Carlson, H. L. and Stenmalm-Sjoblom, L.(1989) A cross cultural study of parents' perception of early childhood programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4* , 505-522.

Carlson, H. L. and Stenmalm, L. (1989). Professional and parent views of early childhood programs: A cross-cultural study. *Early Child Development and Care, 30,* 51-64.

Doverberg, E. & Pramling, I (1985). *Att forsta barns tankar. Metodik for barnintervjuer (To understand children's thinking. Methods for interviewing children.)* Stockholm: Liber Utbildningsforlaget.

Eisner, E. (1974). *Conflicting conceptions of curriculum.* Berkely, California: McCutcheon.

Kelly, G. P. & Altbach, P. G. (1986). Comparative education: Challenge and response. *Comparative Education Review, 30,* 9-27. Reprinted in Altback, P. G. and Kelly G. P. (1986). *New approaches to comparative education.* Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 306-326.

Stenmalm-Sjoblom, L. & Johansson, I. (1992). *Forskolan. Kunskap, Kvalitet, kompetens (Preschool: Knowledge, quality, and competence).* Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell.

Thomas, R. M. (1990). *International comparative education: Practices, issues, and prospects.* New York: Pergamon Press.